

Reincarnating an XOD Division – The Cowes Division, a report

The aim:

To re-establish a competitive XOD racing from Cowes, Isle of Wight

The Background:

Over the last couple of years there has been a decline in the number of dayboats sailed from Cowes on a given weekend during the sailing season. The tailing off of the Dragons and Etchells as regular weekend sailors and the unsuccessful introduction of the Sonar (bolstered by the Island Sailing Club's charter fleet) made an interesting contrast with the more robustly supported Daring Class.

Bar chat led to many current and former Dragon / Etchells / Sonar owners to consider the options open to them for affordable competitive racing that could satisfy the desire for big fleet sailing without big budgets against a backdrop of young families and a reduced appetite for travelling long distances to regattas.

The Challenge:

The Class Captain challenged Cowes to produce interested parties for a resurrection of the division in the spirit of either putting the theory to bed or reinstating the division.

The result:

Mark Hall called a meeting of those that may be interested in sailing XODs from Cowes at the Island Sailing Club in Mid April 2008. The conclusion of the initial meeting was that there was sufficient interest from different parties to attempt to restart the Cowes Division and Mark felt that in order for the division to be taken seriously and to have a chance of success it was necessary for someone to be appointed Divisional Captain and that a second meeting should be held six weeks later at which a plan for racing in July should be set out and officers of the Division duly elected.

There was much lobbying of potential candidates for Divisional Captain but it was clear that the same factors that were driving people to consider XODs were preventing them from taking on the additional responsibility of organising a fledgling Division. i.e. young families, career requirements, time etc.

In the interest of ensuring that the moment did not pass Jeremy Field volunteered to take the role of Divisional Captain and organised the next meeting to take place at the ISC.

Posters were designed and printed which were circulated to all of the XOD affiliated yacht clubs and all of the yacht clubs in Cowes. Most of the sailing associated businesses on Cowes High Street displayed the poster in their windows as did the Regatta centre and all of the Cowes Yacht Clubs, even Cowes Harbour Commission (keen to let more moorings) put up posters in the facilities at Shepherds Wharf and other areas.

Wherever the posters were proffered the reception received was encouraging with most people either knowing someone who had sailed an XOD or were interested to hear of their return to Cowes.

Eddie Mays was a great support and got good coverage online and in magazines for both of the meetings. Jeremy managed to get coverage from Cowes Online and other locally based media.

Despite tying the meeting up with the relaunch of X53 Quest and X81 Sapphire attendance at the second meeting was not quite as strong as was hoped. All of those that did attend were made members of the Division free of charge for the first year and duly elected Jeremy Field Divisional Captain.

A three fold A4 leaflet with the details of racing on each of the weekends of July was given out and numerous people expressed their intention to support the Division.

The racing:

The yacht clubs in Cowes are as aware of their dependence on dayboat sailors for weekend revenue as can be expected and are also alarmed at the decline in the number of boats racing from Cowes. Therefore they could not have been more helpful in providing an additional start in their regular sequences for the XODs. This was also aided by the Cowes Clubs and Classes Committee mentioning the possibility of XODs in Cowes earlier in the year and making provision for such an eventuality.

Sadly the inaugural regatta (3 races per day from a committee boat organised by the Royal London Yacht Club) was lost due to inclement weather, an in auspicious start. However the rest of July was a success with always a minimum of 2 boats sailing with one exception where one of our number went to the Central Solent Regatta.

There is no doubt that the attraction of the British Classic Yacht Regatta and the Household Division Regatta aided the efforts of local sailors in attracting boats and raising the profile of the class. Fourteen XODs sailing in the former and I believe in the vicinity of twenty in the latter.

Having achieved the stated aim of racing XODs from Cowes every weekend in July the offer of racing in September has been made but so far no interest has been expressed. It should however be remembered that this was not part of the original plan for season 2008.

Tuesday night racing from the Island Sailing Club has also been graced by up to three XODs and much interest has been generated there too.

Cowes raised a team for the team racing that was unfortunately cancelled prior to Cowes Week and looks forward to the opportunity to try again next year.

The future:

There will be racing in Cowes for XODs from the first day to the last day of Season 2009.

It is clear that a number of "new" XOD owners that have stated an interest in racing from Cowes have also enjoyed sailing in Yarmouth during the latter part of this season. It is not now and will never be the intention of those trying to drive the Cowes Division to poach boats from other Divisions.

However for Cowes to attract more sailors it will be necessary to present a good standard of competition with other XODs to sail against. With this in mind Neil Payne has been in close contact

with Nick Dorley-Brown about season 2009 and ways in which the Yarmouth and Cowes Divisions can work together to support each other for the benefit of XOD sailing on the Isle of Wight.

Jeremy Field has been in contact with Diana Wilson about utilising existing events such as the Red Funnel Keelboat Championship weekends as a focal point for Hamble Division to join forces with the Island XODs. The lure of two races a day from a committee boat hopefully enough to attract significant numbers of boats.

Early plans are being laid for a regatta in June to kick off the XOD season in Cowes that will leading through the Central Solent Championship to Cowes Week which it is hoped that both Yarmouth & Hamble boats will attend. In return the Cowes Division will support Hamble at the Central Solents and Yarmouth at Sunset Series and the Royal Solent Regatta.

The Boat owners:

The increased activity in the boats for sale market is a reflection of the increased awareness of sailors around the Solent of the opportunities afforded by XODs and many Island sailors have put their money where their mouth is. It remains to be seen where these new owners will sail their boats but there will doubtless be enough for competitive racing in Cowes in 2009.

In order to ensure that the racing is relevant to XODs and Race Officers in Cowes know what we are looking for in terms of racing, Neil Payne has been accepted on to the Cowes Clubs & Classes Committee where he will represent the X Class.

It would seem that the policy of mentioning all members of the division regardless of their performance (in regular newsletters via email that review the weekend's on water and off water action) has helped to encourage those that have not found success as easy to come by as others, this inclusive and friendly attitude becomes a talking point to friends and other sailors.

The Conclusion:

A combination of good PR work with websites and magazines and the great enthusiasm of those that have become regular sailors of XODs recently has helped to spread the word of affordable sailing that is competitive but does allow for a boat to be left on a mooring. The fact that an XOD can be crewed by wives, girlfriends & children is also an undoubted attraction.

The interest generated has yet to peak this was a message that was received on the division's email today –

“Fantastic news for the Cowes Fleet. Whilst having lunch at R.L.Y.C. on Friday, I overheard a conversation that leads me to believe that further boats may arrive from other unexpected quarters!! Perhaps I ought to raid the piggy bank and join a syndicate!”

Another email from a potential XOD purchaser who wishes to sail from Cowes regarding boats for sale was also received.

It would seem that with a little patience, this will not be an overnight sensation but, the Cowes Division will reassert itself. It may not generate the numbers that the Divisional Captain sailed against in Itchenor on the last weekend in August but it will sustain itself.

It would be wrong to close off this report without noting thanks to Tina Scott for all of her support in getting the Cowes Division on its feet and her enthusiasm for what we are trying to do. Also to Mark Hall who not only instigated the first meeting but also brought his boat down to Cowes from Yarmouth to support the various regattas.

Lastly to Neil Payne who by taking his boat and a young crew to front of the fleet has shown that the X Class is not a closed shop but an elite that can be broken into by Corinthian sailors and their families. Equally Neil has been an enthusiastic Island based advocate for XOD sailing meeting potential owners and taking them sailing were possible. At least three new boats on the Island are the direct result of his efforts.

The Cowes Division sails under the burgee of the [Island Sailing Club](#)